

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 TRSE-00
ACDA-12 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04 SIL-01 /091 W
-----069221 261843Z /45

R 261753Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8550
INFO SECDEF WASHDC
USMISSION USNATO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY BONN
USNMR SHAPE
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 11898

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS:
SUBJECT: INDUSTRIAL ACTION THREATENS THE BRITISH
NUCLEAR DETERRENT

SUMMARY: THE ROYAL NAVY IS MOVING TODAY TO USE MILITARY
PERSONNEL TO OVERCOME THE EFFECTS OF AN UNOFFICIAL
INDUSTRIAL ACTION WHICH HAS PREVENTED ONE OF THE UK'S
FOUR POLARIS SUBMARINES FROM LEAVING PORT TO RELIEVE THE
SSBN CURRENTLY AT SEA. THIS STEP, ANNOUNCED YESTERDAY
ON BEHALF OF THE LABOR GOVERNMENT BY DEFENSE MINISTER
MULLEY BECAME NECESSARY IF THE UK IS TO MAINTAIN AT LEAST
ONE SSBN ON STATION. THIS SITUATION ARISES FROM AN
ONGOING DISPUTE BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND ITS BLUE
COLLAR WORKERS WHO HAVE REJECTED A 10 PERCENT WAGE
SETTLEMENT. UNION LEADERS ARE COOPERATING WITH THE
GOVERNMENT IN TRYING TO LIMIT THE EFFECTS OF UNOFFICIAL
INDUSTRIAL ACTIONS. AT THIS POINT, IT SEEMS UNLIKELY
THAT SUCH ACTIONS WILL SIGNIFICANTLY LIMIT HMG'S DEFENSE
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POSTURE. END SUMMARY.

1. FOR MORE THAN A WEEK THE POLARIS SUBMARINE REVENGE
HAS BEEN PREVENTED FROM COMPLETING ITS PREPARATIONS TO
LEAVE THE ROYAL NAVY BASE OF FASLINE BY INDUSTRIAL
ACTION ON THE PART OF CIVIL SERVICE BLUE COLLAR WORKERS.
TWO OTHER SSBNs ARE CURRENTLY UNDERGOING OVERHAUL IN THE

ROSYNTH DOCKYARD. THUS, IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN ONE BOAT ON STATION, THE FOURTH SSBN HAS HAD TO BE KEPT AT SEA BEYOND ITS PROJECTED RETURN TO PORT. FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS, INCLUDING CREW MORALE AND LIMITED FOOD SUPPLIES, ITS RETURN COULD NOT BE POSTPONED INDEFINITELY.

2. YESTERDAY DEFENSE MINISTER MULLEY ANNOUNCED TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD DECIDED TO USE MILITARY PERSONNEL TO GET THE REVENGE TO SEA. TODAY THE ROYAL NAVY CLOSED THE FASLINE BASE TO ALL CIVILIAN WORKERS AND, USING NAVAL PERSONNEL, IS PROCEEDING TO PREPARE IT FOR SAILING. THE MOST DELICATE TASK WHICH THE NAVY WILL TAKE OVER FROM THE NORMAL CIVILIAN OPERATORS IS THE LOADING OF THE POLARIS MISSILES IN THE SUBMARINE. IT IS LIKELY THAT THIS WILL TAKE SOMEWHAT LONGER THAN USUAL, FURTHER DELAYING THE SAILING OF THE REVENGE.

3. THE UNION "BLACKING" OF THE REVENGE IS PART OF A WIDER PAY DISPUTE BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE UNIONS REPRESENTING BLUE COLLAR GOVERNMENT WORKERS. THE WORKERS HAVE REJECTED A GOVERNMENT OFFER OF 10 PERCENT PAY INCREASES, BUT THEIR UNIONS HAVE NOT SANCTIONED STRIKES OR OTHER INDUSTRIAL ACTION. PRESS ATTENTION HAS NATURALLY FOCUSED ON THE PLIGHT OF THE REVENGE, BUT THERE HAVE BEEN SIMILAR UNOFFICIAL INDUSTRIAL ACTIONS THROUGHOUT THE GOVERNMENT. MINISTER MULLEY, FOR INSTANCE, CONFIDENTIAL

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HAVING ANNOUNCED THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION ON THE REVENGE TO PARLIAMENT YESTERDAY, WAS UNABLE TO RETURN TO HIS OFFICE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE IN THE ACCUSTOMED MANNER, HIS DRIVER (AND THOSE OF OTHER MINISTERS) BEING ON STRIKE.

4. COMMENT: IN JUSTIFYING ITS DECISION TO USE MILITARY PERSONNEL TO GET REVENGE TO SEA, MULLEY CITED THE NEED TO MAINTAIN BRITAIN'S OBLIGATIONS TO NATO. HIS PRIVATE SECRETARY HAS TOLD US THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO DOING WHATEVER IS NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN AN SSBN AT SEA. IF THE PAY DISPUTE WITH THE INDUSTRIAL CIVIL SERVICE WORKERS IS NOT SETTLED SOON, THIS COULD MEAN THAT THE ROYAL NAVY WILL ITSELF HAVE TO COMPLETE WORK ON ONE OF THE SSBNs IN THE ROSYNTH DOCKYARD, AND THE OPERATING CYCLE OF ALL FOUR SSBNs COULD IN THE END BE SERIOUSLY DISRUPTED.

4. THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE EMPLOYS ABOUT 80 PERCENT OF THE GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL WORKERS, AND SO IS HARDEST HIT BY THESE WORK ACTIONS. THE DISPUTE HAS ALSO HAD SOME EFFECT ON THE NATIONALIZED ARMS INDUSTRY. OTHER THAN THE

REVENGE, THERE HAS AS YET BEEN NO DEGRADATION OF THE
CAPACITY OF THE ARMED FORCES. THIS SAME DISPUTE HAS,

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 11898

HOWEVER, IMPACTED ON THE U.S. ABILITY TO CONDUCT PORT
VISITS AT BRITISH NAVAL BASES, LEADING THE UK TO REFUSE
ONE PROPOSED VISIT, AND LIMITING FACILITIES AVAILABLE TO
THE NIMITZ IN PORTSMOUTH LAST MONTH.

5. WE UNDERSTAND FROM TUC SOURCES THAT THE LEADERS OF
THE TWO MAJOR UNIONS INVOLVED--THE TRANSPORT AND GENERAL
WORKERS AND THE GENERAL AND MUNICIPAL WORKERS--HAVE BEEN
IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH THE GOVERNMENT AND PROMISED THEIR
COOPERATION IN TRYING TO LIMIT THE EFFECTS OF THE UNOFFI-
CIAL ACTIONS AND TO ALLOW THE SSBNS TO MEET THEIR SCHE-
DULES. TO THESE ENDS THEY HAVE REFUSED TO SANCTION
INDUSTRIAL ACTIONS, URGED WORKERS TO RETURN TO THEIR JOBS
AND/OR WORK NORMALLY, AND SOUGHT TO ISOLATE THE DISSIDENT
WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE UNIONS. THEY HAVE ALSO CLOSED
THEIR EYES TO GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO OVERCOME THE EFFECTS
OF THE UNOFFICIAL ACTIONS BY USE OF MILITARY PERSONNEL,
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WHILE THE GOVERNMENT, FOR ITS PART, HAS SCRUPULOUSLY
AVOIDED CROSSING UNOFFICIAL PICKET LINES--WITNESS THE
CLOSURE OF THE FASLINE BASE TO CIVILIAN WORKERS SO THAT
MILITARY PERSONNEL COULD GET THE REVENGE READY FOR SEA.
AT THIS POINT THE WILDCAT ACTIONS DO NOT SEEM LIKELY TO
SPREAD, THOUGH SUCH A POSSIBILITY CANNOT BE TOTALLY
DISCOUNTED. FOR NOW, AT LEAST, IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT
THIS DISPUTE WILL SIGNIFICANTLY LIMIT BRITISH DEFENSE
READINESS.

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